



Meliorate women Through Literacy

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ABSTRACT

Women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms. Little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment. The discussion starts with the status of women in India and world, their literacy rate. Since the literacy rate is low in India, literacy campaigns were established by government and private to literate women where needed and empower them. It was found and proved that women literacy benefits themselves and all sections of society. The discussion next moves to the various government initiated exclusive projects for developing women literacy rate and various recommendations.

KEYWORDS : Universal Declaration of Human Rights, SarvaSikshaAbhijan, SahajaniShiksha Kendra, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Millennium Development Goals, Human Development Index

INTRODUCTION

Education's importance has been emphasized by a number of international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. Literacy is increasingly accepted as the 'invisible glue' to achieving many broader developmental goals, which are vital to the empowerment of women. In the increasingly open global economy, countries with high rates of illiteracy and gender gaps in educational attainment tend to be less competitive, because foreign investors seek labour that is skilled as well as inexpensive. Various global trends pose special challenges to women who are illiterate or have limited education. Economies' export orientation and the growing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises create opportunities for women, but women need the appropriate education and training to take full advantage of these opportunities. The new imperative for effective global leadership is about collaborating and seeking diverse perspectives to make better decisions and achieve better outcomes through women education. It's time for us to acknowledge and empower the broadest pool of talent.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices in India. Since post independence, government of India took initiatives, designed programmes, introduced policies, prominent place in five year plans to uplift literacy rate of women.

CONTRIBUTION OF LITERACY CAMPAIGNS FOR FEMALE LITERACY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

➤ **Heightened Social Awareness-** Heightened social awareness among women regarding the importance of education, both for themselves as well as for their children. creation of a positive environment for literacy, women receive a social sanction to participate in the literacy programs, acquired a heightened sense of self-awareness and desire to gain knowledge of host of women issues.

➤ **Increased School Enrolment-** Motivated and encouraged women learners to educate their children, particularly girls by enrolling them in formal schools. The need to provide equal opportunity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity and quality of primary schooling.

➤ **Increase in Self-confidence and Personality Development-** Break the isolation which is socially structured into their lives, giving them a chance to meet other women and learn collectively- rather than learn singly as individuals. The newly acquired literacy skills have enhanced their ability to solve family problems and learn new skills.

➤ **Gender Equity and Women Empowerment-** Provided illiterate adult women, who have been denied access to formal schooling, with a great opportunity for reading, writing, increasing awareness levels and skills training. Actively promoted gender equity and have sought to empower them as to decision making about themselves, their families and their communities.

➤ **Status in the Family-** Improving the status of women within their own families. Newly found self-belief in having say both within and without the family was built.

➤ **Educational Equality-** Higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered compared to the non-literate householders.

➤ **Women as Entrepreneurs-** Literacy campaigns has opened several opportunities for neo-literate women to step out of the households and involve themselves in some enterprise or a new vocation. These campaigns helped women to set up Didi Bank (Sister Bank) which promotes the habits of thrifts and savings.

➤ **Household Savings and Access to Credit-** The literacy campaigns have gone beyond the transaction of mere literacy skills and have served to enhance knowledge and skills for better management of expenditure and improving earning capacities. In several districts, the women participants in literacy campaigns have begun to set aside their earnings not only in regular banks but also in specially thrift societies. Such societies, as for example in Dumka are run by the women themselves.

➤ **Health and Hygiene-** Health and hygiene issues became an integral component of adult education programs. Campaigns have helped to spread knowledge about health care and nutrition, thereby enabling mothers to keep their family in better health and to care better for their children. Created awareness about problems of early marriage, spacing and small family norms.

BENEFITS OF WOMEN LITERACY

- Rises fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves.
- Increase in women's participation in the labour force and their contributions to household and national income.
- Women's increased earning capacity, in turn, has a positive effect on child nutrition.
- Children, especially daughters of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment.
- Educated women are more politically aware, participate and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

- In the home they promote health care, and education, creating a standard for the future. For developing nations to continue to grow it is crucial that they provide education to the entire population.

Government Initiated Projects for Developing Women Literacy

National Policy on Education propagates new values through re-designed text books, curriculums, and stationary and so on. These materials have been modeled to suit the needs of women accordingly.

Sakshaar Bharat Mission for Female literacy was launched in 2001, to prevent the alarming drop in female education. Its aim was to reduce the illiteracy rate of women by half. In spite of being new in the arena, it has managed to do its share.

Indian ShikshaKarmi Project is about sharing power through education. This tries to preach the ignorant Indian population that women too can rise to be on the top after acquiring education. This plan is co-supported by the Swedish Government and it is in vogue in Rajasthan.

Training of Female teachers to educate the nation is also another forte of the "Indian ShikshaKarmi Project". This plan educates them the technical know-how's that are required to become a teacher.

Scholarships for her helps the ignorant section of the society who always roots for the education of their sons. Due to several biases and superstitions they ignore the education of their daughters. But when questioned they cite financial difficulties. Several scholarships have been introduced by the central as well as the state government such as the Single girl child scholarship for women, Scholarship for women scientists and so on. Several scholarships such as the Maulana Azad national Scholarship have been launched to assist meritorious girl Students belonging from minority communities.

MahilaSamakhyaProgram was launched as a rural wing of the SarvaSikshaAbhijan (SSA). It was launched mainly to help and empower the weaker section of rural women.

Kasturba Gandhi BalikaVidyalayaScheme aims to serve girls from backward classes and those having financial difficulties. These schools take up about 75% of students from backward classes and 25% from BPL (Below Poverty Level). 54.16% of women from the backward classes are now with education according to the 2001 census report.

National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level reaches to the remote places. This program has uplifted the education standards of several women across the backward provinces of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Bihar and so on. The female literacy rate grew from 53.67% to 65.46% as per 2011 Census data. The male literacy rate in comparison rose from 75.26% to only 82.14%. So the literacy rate of women is improving at a better rate than for men, thanks to different initiatives by the state governments as well as the central government.

SahajaniShiksha Kendra (SSK) literacy and educational programme for women's empowerment in rural and adolescent girls was initiated in 2002, in Lalitpur district of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. an innovative ethnographic research on literacy-numeracy practices, developing and testing various packages and modules of thematic literacy and Continuing Education (CE), and linking issues of health, gender, violence, caste, right to work, etc, with the educational work. This work on women's literacy along with awareness on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), to enable their access to information on NREGA and to help women grow in confidence to demand and get their rightful entitlements vis-a-vis NREGA.

The U.N. Millennium Summit, held in September 2000, produced a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) covering a range of development issues, including reducing child mortality, fighting various infectious diseases, eradicating illiteracy, and empowering women. The international community recognizes that unless girls' education improves, few of the MDGs will be achieved. Two of the goals deal specifically with female education and women's empowerment.

Goal 1: Achieve universal primary education ensure that, by 2015, all children, boys and girls alike, will have access to a full course of primary education

Goal 2: Promote gender equality and empower women. By eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.

Recommendations for action

- Facilitators should be trained to develop specific empowering learning strategies linked to opportunities for progression within lifelong learning systems.
- Small-step progression that creates routes towards empowerment and change, as well as opportunities for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills, should be part of such strategies.
- Learning providers should access, analyse and remove barriers to women's participation in learning. For this purpose, they should carry out research and needs assessments, use the media, and work with community leaders, influencers and families to gain their support.
- The involvement of men is a key requirement for successful change processes.
- Design learning opportunities that are relevant, attractive and motivational to women. This means that women need to be involved in the design, planning, review and evaluation of literacy learning. This also requires the professional development of programme providers and educators.
- Understanding of issues related to gender equality, creative empowerment strategies for men and women, skills to negotiate with existing power structures, community influencers and organisations to support change.
- National and local governments should develop policies from a lifelong learning perspective, to empower women through literacy learning and further learning opportunities. In doing so, they must listen to women, their needs and their stories.

Expanding women's education has become an important objective for developing countries. The benefits are undeniable, educated women contribute positively to every aspect of society. Within the community they add to the labour force, increasing GNP, and ultimately increasing a country's level of income.

Table showing literacy pattern in India (Census 2011)

DETAILS	FIGURES
Population of India	1,210,193,422
Total expenditure on education as % of GNP	4.1
Primary school net enrolment / attendance ratio (2005–2010)	95%
Primary school completion rate	90%
Total youth literacy rate (15 – 24 years, 2005 – 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female: 74% • Male: 88% Total: 81%

Statistical sources- UNESCO: EFA Global Monitoring, UNICEF, World Bank: World Development Indicators database, Nation Master

Table showing female literacy rate and HDI in India

Indian states	Female literacy rate	HDI
Kerala	91.98	0.790
Goa	81.84	0.617
Punjab	71.34	0.605
Arunachal Pradesh	59.57	0.573
Jammu & Kashmir	58.01	0.529
Rajasthan	52.66	0.43

Statistical sources- UNESCO: EFA Global Monitoring, UNICEF, World Bank: World Development Indicators database, Nation Master

The above table shows a direct relationship between the female literacy rate and HDI (composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income indices **used to rank areas**) in few states of India. As the female literacy rate is more, those states had a raise in their HDI.

Conclusion

Women are the largest emerging market in the world. Over the next decade, they will wield enormous influence over politics, sport, business and society. It's not a platitude but a fact. In the next five years, the global incomes of women will grow. According to United Nations data, women invest a larger proportion of their income than men in the education of their children, preparing the latter to make a greater economic impact in the future. New markets, rapid growth markets, emerging markets, no matter what you call them, they offer the best growth prospects for businesses after the global downturn of the past few years. But perhaps the biggest and most exciting new market of all is an overlooked one: women. "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." Education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. "By acquiring literacy, women become more economically self-reliant and more actively engaged in their country's social, political and cultural life. All evidence shows that investment in literacy for women yields high development dividends."

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